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# THE DOCTRINE OF SATAN

## I

### IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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*The early Christian writers devoted pages to their discussion of the work of Satan and devils. They saw their presence both in idols and in philosophers. Whence did this belief originate? How far is it an essential element of Christianity? Is it an inseparable part of biblical belief? These questions are not academic. Among the rank and file of Christians to believe in a personal devil is often made a test of orthodoxy. This article of Dr. Caldwell's is the first of three in which he traces the history of the doctrine of Satan in the Old Testament, in the inter-biblical literature, and in the New Testament.*

When we begin the study of the Old Testament we are likely to be surprised to find that Old Testament piety arose and flourished without some elements of doctrine which to modern Christians often seem indispensable. For example, it has been a source of wonder that Judaism could furnish so many martyrs to the ideals of a supra-mundane life without the hope of a blessed personal immortality. In like manner, it must strike the general reader of the Bible as being strange, if true, that no such person as the devil of traditional theology appears in the Old Testament. In the theology of many Christians the doctrine of the devil is only second to the doctrine of God, and the devil is an indispensable part of the machinery of faith and piety.

It may be admitted, however, with reference to Old Testament faith, that some form of dualism was probably always present. There was of course no place for any sort of Persian dualism, positing an eternal struggle between two self-existent deities, the one good, the

other evil. For the God of Israel is supreme and beside him there is no other. But there is a dualism in experience. There is an evil side to Nature and to human life. And so we are not surprised to find recognition of this dualism in early times. Israelites believed in evil spirits dwelling in wild wastes away from the habitation of man, although the references are often obscure and the translation of the Authorized Version misleading. (For example, Deut. 32:17; Lev. 17:17; Isa. 13:21; 34:14, etc.) But it may be worth while to examine one case of obscure reference, viz., to Azazel, which seems to be a demon of the desert.

#### Azazel

In Lev., chap. 16, we have the mention of Azazel in connection with the great Day of Atonement, but there is no explanation. "And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats: one for the Lord and the other for Azazel. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a sin-offering. But the goat on which

the lot for Azazel fell, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement with him and let him go to Azazel in the desert."

It must be admitted at the outset that one of the latest and best authorities (Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, 1906) explains the word Azazel not as a proper name, but as a reduplicated, intensive, abstract formation, meaning "entire removal"—in this case, "entire removal of sin and guilt from sacred places into the desert on the back of a goat, the symbol of entire forgiveness." But this view has some very strong opponents who take the word as a proper name of a spirit haunting the desert. Nestle says, "If one reads Lev., chap. 16, with an open mind, the impression is that Azazel must be related to Yahweh in something of the same way as Ahriman to Ormuzd, or Satan (Beelzebub) to God" (*Encyc. Religion and Ethics*). Cheyne supposes the ritual of Azazel on the Day of Atonement was partly to provide the ignorant people with a visible token of the removal of sins of the year, partly to abolish the cultus of the *Seirim* by substituting a single personal angel, Azazel (evil no doubt by nature, but rendered harmless by being bound), for the crowd of impersonal and dangerous *Seirim*. Azazel seems to have been one of the spirits haunting the wilderness which had received a name and a place and been clothed with attributes sufficiently well known to those for whom the ritual was intended, however vague to us. Origen identifies Azazel with Satan, as he does also the serpent of Gen., chap. 3. Benzinger accepts Reuss's statement that "the

conception of Azazel lies on the way which led later to the devil."

### The Serpent

Next it will be necessary to speak of the Serpent in the account of the Fall, which traditional theology has identified with the devil. We do not have here a personal Satan, but we have a subtle animal performing functions later assigned to the devil, as tempter, calumniator, and hinderer. For the serpent is represented as tempting man, calumniating God, and hindering the progress of innocence by introducing sin into the new creation. He mars man's relation with his fellow-man: the guilty pair must hide from each other by means of fig leaves. He mars man's relation to God: the transgressors seek to hide from God among the trees.

With minds formed by the traditional theology, the interpretation given by the New Testament, and the popular conceptions of Milton, Bunyan, and Luther, and mediaevalism in general, it is difficult, indeed it requires a kind of act of self-denial, not to see the devil in the serpent and to hear his voice as the serpent speaks in the well-known devilish, questioning, denying, false-promising way (Gen. 3:4, 5). But the story is pre-exilic, and moves in a time when the full conception of a personal Satan had not arisen on Hebrew soil. The sacred writer knows God as good and man as innocent, but he finds sin knocking at the door in the subtlety of one of the animals that had passed before man.

And yet this animal does not appear to be an ordinary animal. It is endowed with the faculty of speech and

inspired with occult wisdom, able to prophesy the effect of eating from the forbidden tree. The serpent appears as a medium of the power of temptation. Its function is to present the outward object with suggestions calculated to stir the sinful desire within the soul. It makes the appeal of apparently superior wisdom to the natural inclinations of innocence—an appeal to the senses. When curiosity and suspicion have been aroused and assurance given of the harmlessness of the inhibited act and promises given of its magic effect, the excited desire does the rest. Under the skilful stimulation of the serpent the act comes to have a value for life which overcomes the center of consciousness and sends all scruples to the periphery. The act is the free choice of the soul, conditioned by its endowment and environment.

The wisdom of the serpent is proverbial (Matt. 10:16). This ascription of wisdom to the serpent rests not on observation but on inference. Its movements, its powers of fascination, suggest a demonic character which has been attributed to it. Still it is a beast of the field and a creature of Jehovah, although it has superhuman knowledge, the power of speech, and hostility to God. The beast is not simply a sharp suggester of thoughts which become evil in human consciousness and act, but it is itself regarded as evil.

This is the sober, literal statement of the serpent as one of Jehovah's creatures. But a literal interpretation of the story yields results which, if they do not contain an inner contradiction, at least leave us with the feeling that we have not fully fathomed some hidden mystery.

Perhaps the sacred writer has availed himself of an earlier story in which the demonic character of the serpent was as clear as it is here obscure. The serpent elsewhere is worshiped as a good demon. Such worship may form the background of this story. If then the monotheistic principle has not completely eliminated all the mythological features of the story which was to be used for ethical and religious purposes, we can better understand the difficulty of interpreting it on Old Testament soil where animals do not elsewhere exhibit any analogous powers. The difficulty could not be met by exegesis; it had to be met in later Judaism, not by a literal interpretation of the story, but by a higher deliverance which was essentially a new construction of the facts of human life and experience.

The surprising thing is that the later Jewish and New Testament conception seems to be more in accord with Persian mythology, of an incarnation of an evil spirit, than with the narrative before us, which gives no hint of an external evil person speaking through the serpent, but represents the serpent simply as one of Jehovah's creatures, only more subtle than the rest. The sacred writer gives us no clue to the origin of evil, but he has given us a masterly psychological analysis of the process of temptation through suggestion of doubt, assumption of superior wisdom that knows how to deny the evil and promise the good, and through the aesthetic, intellectual, and utilitarian appeal of the "forbidden fruit" itself.

The curse upon the serpent knows nothing of anything but the beast and its posterity. It is to go upon its

belly, eat dust, and endure man's enmity.

### Satan

The word Satan is often used in the Old Testament as a verb, meaning to be or act as an adversary. Satan as a noun means a human adversary as in I Sam. 29:4, or a superhuman adversary as in Num. 22:22. Satan as a proper name occurs in not more than three passages in the Old Testament, and they are all late and probably not independent of each other: Job. 1:6, 2:1; Zech 3:1, 2; I Chron. 21:1. Perhaps only the last has the right to be called strictly a proper name. In the Septuagint, under later influences, it is translated *diabolos* (*B-D-B. Lex.*).

There can be no reasonable doubt that the doctrine of Satan suffered some assimilation to the Persian doctrine of Ahriman. But the Persian influence has often been exaggerated. There was an internal process of development within the life of Judaism, in which the monotheistic principle was regulative. In the earlier Scriptures angels appear as bearers of blessings, curses, and commands of God (Judg. 5:23), but often they are, like the Word and Wisdom, only functionally separate from God. "The *function* of an angel so overshadows his personality that the Old Testament does not ask who or what the angel is, but what he does." Angels that have evil tasks are not themselves thereby evil, since God is the author of evil (Amos 3:6). And they are merely his executives. Angels appear in the Old Testament mediating God's judgments, his chastisements, and his testings. For example, the destroying angel that smote the Egyptians, the angel of pestilence that brought

chastisement to David, and the angels that came in later times to challenge character. These latter especially concern us here. In this regard the Book of Job is worthy of special examination, for its prologue mentions one of the "sons of God," or angels, called Satan or Adversary. Anything like a clear outline of Satan appears here for the first time in the Old Testament. But even here it is *the* Satan. The presence of the article denotes the function of adversary rather than a character personally adverse to the good. The Satan appears among the angels who form the council of heaven about the king on the throne. It is the duty of the Adversary to challenge and test the good. He is the enemy of sham and false pretensions. He reports for duty to the king and executes his will, and yet he is not a mere instrument; he is an intelligent servant who knows how to offer suggestions for a test-experiment, and he is jealous for the honor of God. There is no suggestion of a fallen angel filled with rebellion and hatred to God. Satan is a person more than functionally separate from God, but always under the divine will and powerless without the divine permission. He is a servant who knows how to disappear when his work is done. When Job's "friends" arrive there is no need for Satan.

The scene in Zech., chap. 3, is akin to that in Job. Satan challenges the standing of the restored community in its faded glory, misery, and meanness. Its representatives are diminished men with shallow godliness, when compared with the great figures of the past. The thoughts must arise, Can God take these poor men and build a new church-

nation? The men are once more on holy ground, but is their character worthy, their repentance deep, their reconciliation real? Is this movement man's or God's for the founding of a new Kingdom in righteousness and glory and strength? These thoughts, which have distressed the faithful, receive objective dramatic presentation in Zech., chap. 3. Joshua the high priest represents the people, clothed in filthy garments. He stands before the Lord and Satan stands at his right to oppose him. In other words, we have on the one side God's love and grace shown in the restoration and the danger of complaisance in filthy or mean garments, on the other side the severe, trying, testing providence of God. Both in the case of Job and of Joshua, God and the good are justified and Satan is defeated, and in a certain sense condemned. In the one case it is said of Satan, "Thou didst set me on against him" (Job), in the other, "The Lord rebuke thee, Satan." Satan can do nothing beyond the permission of God, and God's ultimate purpose throughout is benevolent. But still it cannot be denied that the prosecuting attorney seems to relish the task before him, the censor tends to become censorious, the criminal lawyer to become criminal.

Envy and hatred and desire to mis-

lead are not far away from one who has no belief in human virtue and the sincerity of human repentance and the disinterestedness of human piety. "Satan shows an assiduity slightly too keen in the exercise of his somewhat invidious functions."

The last book of the Old Testament that speaks of Satan is I Chronicles. In this book (21:1) we read that Satan rose up against Israel and moved David to number the people; this is regarded as a sin. The same act of David is recorded in II Samuel (24:1), but here it is said, "God moved David." We have here a change from Hebrew to Jewish theology, reminding us of the great change that took place in Christian theology in the opening of the nineteenth century, when one of the founders of Methodism said to the high Calvinists, "Your God is my devil." The author of the passage in Samuel does not hesitate to attribute a direct agency to God from which the later writer shrinks. We have the same facts, David, a census, a pestilence; but the theological construction is different. A different idea of God and his relation to the world is reflected in the Chronicler. With him God cannot tempt to evil. The explanation of David's conduct is simple: "Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel."